

# Begin a Poem With a Picture

Poet Nikki Grimes shows how you can write a picture poem

“Sideyard” is one of my favorite poems. Let me tell you how I wrote it. I was looking at a picture one day. I asked myself: What am I looking at? The answer: an old house in the country, with roses leaning against the walls. Their leaves seemed to be fluttering. They made me think about the way the wind sometimes whistles at night. Here is what I wrote down:

## The First Draft

*Did you hear it last night, Lord?  
I never knew the wind could sing  
or sigh the way it did  
back through the dogwood trees  
behind great grandpa’s house  
last week  
I never saw so many flowers,  
either, Lord  
You see the way those roses hugged  
the porch?  
I guess they love that old house as  
much as me  
Please bless great grandma for  
asking me to visit, Lord.*

As I usually do, I began to write using everyday language, as though I were speaking. I knew I would add some rhyme later. But first, I



needed to decide whose house this was, and I needed to explain why the girl in the picture had never seen so many flowers before. I pretended that I was that girl.

## The Second Draft

*The wind sang and sighed like an  
old woman spookin’ the dog-  
wood trees back of grandma’s  
house last night  
I never heard the wind sing or sigh  
before  
not where I live,  
not in the city  
I never saw so many flowers,  
either, Lord.  
You see the way those rose bushes  
climbed the stair  
and hugged that porch?  
I guess they love that timber house  
as much as me.  
God, please bless grandma for let-  
ting me come to visit  
And while you’re at it, Lord  
ask her if I can stay again next  
year.*

Obviously, the girl enjoyed the sound of the night wind whipping through the trees, but not everybody does. So I added a younger brother to the poem:

## From the Third Draft

*The wind sang and sighed like an  
old woman spookin’ the dog-  
wood trees back of grandma’s  
house last night  
My little brother said it was an  
awful fright,  
but me, I loved it.*

Then—in the fourth and final draft—I added a few more rhymes and finished off the poem. I hope you enjoy reading it!

## Now Write a Poem

Find a picture that you like in a book or magazine, or use a picture that one of your friends drew. Try to imagine what the people in the picture are thinking about or doing. If it’s a picture of people riding a bus, imagine who’s in it and where they might be going or coming from. It helps if you imagine that you are one of those people! Once you’ve got a few ideas, make up a poem to match the picture.

ILLUSTRATIONS: BETH GLICK